2005

Alcman's Parteneion and Eliade's Sacred Time

Lee E. Patterson
Eastern Illinois University, lepatterson2@eiu.edu

Classical and Modern Literature, 25/1 (2005): 115-127

Alcman's *Partheneion* and Eliade's Sacred Time

Lee E. Patterson

Fragment 1 of the seventh-century Spartan poet Alcman, better known as the Louvre *Partheneion*, remains one of the most vexing specimens of Greek lyric. Scholars have debated with great vigor about the meaning of various elements in the poem: the Tyndaridae legend, Πόρος (line 14), φᾶρος (line 61), the light imagery, the horse imagery, the Pleiades (line 60), the "Ten" and the "Eleven" (lines 98-99), and so on. Although definitive interpretations are elusive, I believe that one viable solution to the meaning of these elements and their function in the poem is at hand through a hitherto unexplored avenue of inquiry, Mircea Eliade's theory of sacred time. Alcman's poem was intended to be sung by a chorus of girls performing some sort of ritual. Although we cannot be sure what kind of ritual it was, whether involving agriculture, marriage, or something else, as a religious ritual the ceremony was essentially an intersection of the world of myth and the quotidian world, the everyday world whose functions included agriculture, marriage, and other things that rituals are supposed to enable. Generally speaking, a ritual's success depends on the other world, which expresses itself most dramatically through myth, even as it employs implements of *this* world (torches, farm equipment, sacrificial victims, etc.). This interaction was of particular interest to Eliade and permeates much of his prodigious corpus, where he discusses the two worlds in terms of the "sacred" and the "profane." It is by relating each of the puzzling elements listed above to the "sacred," by showing how the performance of the *Partheneion* brought its participants into sacred time—"a primordial mythical time made present"—that I hope to uncover their meaning and function.[1]

[1] Two points bear noting here. First, Eliade himself wrote little of Greek myth, preferring to study the myths of what he called "primitive" cultures, such as the Ngadju Dayak of Borneo. Quite rightly he considered the myths as we have them now, through Homer, Hesiod and others, as a mere "interpretation of archaic materials." The problem for a historian of religion like Eliade is that "we do not know a single Greek myth within its ritual context." See Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago:

Much of our attention will be focused on two girls in particular, Hagesichora and Agido. We will see how they are vitally important to the success of the ritual as they bring to life the myths recounted in the poem. In one of these myths, a cosmogony, Alcman alludes to a power that originally enabled the universe to form and now will be used to bring success to the ritual. In a sense, as Eliade would argue, to make the myth live again is to tap into that creative power. Alcman does more than merely refer to the other myth. He gives us a brief narrative involving the Dioscuri, Castor and Polydeuces, to whom I will refer as the Tyndaridae since the story is about how they slew the Hippocoontidae, their cousins through their mortal father Tyndareus. These myths are not merely referred to or even reenacted; they are "reactualized," made real again. From the perspective of the girls' chorus conducting the ritual and performing the song associated with it, Tyndareus' sons are as real as the girls themselves. In fact, as we shall see, Hagesichora and Agido effectively *become* the Tyndaridae in the here and now and are empowered by the same facilitating agency that enabled the Tyndaridae to succeed in their own endeavor. Two key elements in this analysis, therefore, will be the *perspective* of the ritual's participants and the *oral* nature of the poem performed in the ceremony. Indeed, Eliade himself says that passing into sacred time can help not only to make someone fertile, to heal someone, or to make crops grow, but also "to stimulate poetic inspiration."[2] In the case of Alcman's maidens, the act of performing is a sacred act, analogous, as we shall see, to a shaman entering sacred time by performing an oral poem.

U of Chicago Pr, 1969), 72-73. However, I submit that Alcman's *Partheneion* provides a rare exception, two myths, a cosmogony and an account of the Dioscuri, in a religious context. Second, I should point out that by even attempting to apply Eliadean theory to shed light on Alcman's *Partheneion*, I am joining one side of a scholarly controversy over the value and usefulness of Eliade's ideas to the study of religion, or in fact of any other arena of human existence and consciousness. This controversy arises in large part from the erratic methodology he employed, leading to ambiguities, inconsistencies, assumptions, and generalizations that have not found favor among many scholars. But the nature of Eliade's theories itself and the high potential to misinterpret them have also fueled the controversy. In a recent collection of opinions on Eliade, *Changing Religious Worlds: The Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade* (Albany: State U of New York Pr, 2001), 279, the editor, Bryan Rennie, speaks to the *relative* value of Eliade in the study of religious and other human experience: "Apparently, those who 'believe in' Eliade's thought, who make positive valorizations of it . . . are those who can use it. Douglas Allen for personal renewal, David Cave for the cultivation of virtue, and William Paden for the comparison of religious world habitation. Those who don't believe in it, can't use it. To them it remains meaningless and pointless."

[2] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1987), 82.

The performance of the *Partheneion* takes advantage of the immediacy of myth in sacred time by using myth's power to accomplish the ritual's goal.

To understand its applicability to Alcman's poem, let us begin with Eliade's basic concept of "the sacred":

> [H]owever complex a religious festival may be, it always involves a sacred event that took place *ab origine* and that it ritually made present. The participants in the festival become contemporaries of the mythical event. In other words, they emerge from their historical time—that is, from the time constituted by the sum total of profane personal and intrapersonal events—and recover primordial time, which is always the same, which belongs to eternity. Religious man periodically finds his way into mythical and sacred time, re-enters the *time of origin*, the time that "floweth not" because it does not participate in profane temporal duration, because it is composed of an *eternal present*, which is indefinitely recoverable.[3]

In other words, sacred time is timeless; it has no duration the way historical time does and is thus always there, ready to be experienced by someone performing a ritual, as the chorus of Alcman's poem is doing. Eliade firmly believed that the sacred was essential to life, that the "awareness of a real and meaningful world is intimately related to the discovery of the sacred. Through the experience of the sacred, the human mind grasped the difference between that which reveals itself as real, powerful, rich, and meaningful, and that which does not—i.e., the chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their fortuitous, meaningless appearances and disappearances."[4] This chaotic world is the everyday world of our lives and constitutes what Eliade calls the profane. It is the world of the sun, clouds, trees, rocks, man-made objects like Alcman's φᾶρος (whether it be a robe, plow, torch, or something else), and anything else one can see in the physical world. But as I have already suggested, the sacred and the profane are not in opposition; they are in fact *interdependent*. Even if the φᾶρος is a simple farm implement, it becomes something more significant, more "meaningful," in the context of the ritual and is in fact important to the ritual's objective.[5]

Although we do not have the entire *Partheneion*, we have a reasonable sense of the poem's overall structure. The poem may have originally been 140 lines, with the extant text in three columns (lines 1-34, 35-68, 69-101) and a *coronis* in the fourth indicating that the poem ended four lines after

---

[3] Eliade, *Sacred* (above, note 2), 88.

[4] Eliade, *Quest* (above, note 1), i.

[5] On this interdependence, see further Bryan Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State U of New York Pr, 1996), 31.

101. It has been conjectured that another column to the left of the damaged one containing 1-34 might have supplied an additional 35 lines, bringing the total to 140.[6] As Campbell, Robbins,[7] and others have recognized, such a reconstruction renders the following structure: the first half (70 lines) relates a legend of the slaying of the sons of Hippocoon by Polydeuces and (almost certainly) Castor, the Tyndaridae,[8] and concludes with a moral about the dangers of *hybris*, for which the Hippocoontidae had paid the price; the second half (70 lines) focuses on a girls' chorus performing a ceremony. In Eliadean terms, the ceremony referred to in the second half reactualizes the myth in the first half.[9]

As noted earlier, there are actually two myths in the first half. Alcman makes subtle reference to a cosmogony from one of his other poems (Fragment 5, Page) with the word Πόρος, literally "passage-way" but here probably "a means of achieving." It occurs at line 14 at the beginning of the moralizing section that follows a list of the Hippocoontidae. As Eliade reckoned, a cosmogony is the ultimate example of myth in that the latter's basic function is to show how things have come into existence. An act of creation, an etiology, at some level and to some degree is always involved in a myth.[10] West conjectures that in Alcman's cosmogony *Poros* and *Tekmor* play a role in shaping a universe that was originally ἄπορον καὶ ἀτέκμαρτον. *Tekmor* allows differentiation to occur, permitting light to be separated from dark and so on.[11] *Poros* would seem to serve as some sort of

---

[6] See, for example, David A. Campbell, ed., *Greek Lyric Poetry* (London: Bristol Classical Pr, 1998), 195.

[7] E. Robbins, "Alcman's *Partheneion*: Legend and Choral Ceremony," *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1994): 7-16, on pages 14-15.

[8] Compare the version that has Heracles kill the Hippocoontidae, which may or may not have been included in Alcman's account. See Campbell (above, note 6), 197-198. I am less inclined to accept that this version was here. I do not believe the Tyndaridae could have served the purpose Alcman had in mind for them if he had also referred to Heracles.

[9] However, one should keep in mind the distinction between content and performance. The two halves of the poem itself are distinct, but the chorus is still performing it from beginning to end. Myth is reactualized throughout the poem, and there is only one kind of reactualization ever at work throughout the ceremony.

[10] See Rennie (above, note 5), 67-68, for a discussion of Eliade's view of the significance of cosmologies, with quotations from several of Eliade's works. In fact Eliade seems to have overstated the case: can we say that the cosmogony provides the pattern for *all* myth?

[11] M. L. West, "Alcman and Pythagoras," *Classical Quarterly* 17 (1967): 1-15, on page 2. The word τέκμωρ, the epic form of τέκμαρ, means "boundary" or "sign."

facilitator of the cosmogonic process. According to the *Partheneion*, Αἶσα παντῶν / [καὶ Πόρος] γεραιτάτοι / σιῶν ("Aisa and Poros are the oldest of the gods") (13-15). The restoration of καὶ Πόρος to line 14 is based on a comment by Scholiast A, who equates *Poros* with Hesiod's *Chaos*, the oldest divinities.[12] The significance of *Poros* to the *Partheneion* lies in the phrase ἀπ]έδιλος ἀλκά (line 15), still in the moralizing section. Following West's interpretation, a suitable translation of this phrase might be "unshod aid," offered by someone too hurriedly to strap on his shoes. West argues that, since the phrase occurs in a moralizing passage and thus should be taken as aphoristic, Alcman means us to see this immediate and thus effective assistance as divine.[13] West's interpretation makes sense if we consider that the next several lines warn against attempting to fly to heaven and to marry Aphrodite or some other goddess, all-too-familiar sentiments expressing the Greeks' (especially the lyric poets') concern for knowing one's place and not reaching too high for success or happiness, lest the gods show their disapproval. This lesson was not learned by the Hippocoontidae, and those who taught them that lesson, the Tyndaridae, were assisted by the divine itself. In this way *Poros*, the divine power that gave rise to the universe, also provides swift aid to the Tyndaridae and enables them to exact the necessary punishment on the Hippocoontidae. To put it in Eliade's terms, when the chorus performs the first half of the poem, they are reactualizing these myths and thus drawing on that power for sake of accomplishing the ritual's objective.

What then do we make of the second half of the poem? The first half gives us the myths; the second half focuses on the participants of the ritual themselves. What purpose does this apparent self-reflection serve, and can we say that myth is reactualized here as well? The answers come from an important aspect of Eliade's approach to the sacred, the importance of perspective. The sacred is ultimately a matter of point of view. While the significance of the sacred is that it is *real* and *meaningful*, it is the *perspective* of the given culture that makes it so. Eliade is not concerned whether the sacred in any given situation has an ontology independent of the believers' beliefs, for that "is a question for theology or

---

[12] Denys L. Page, *Alcman, the Partheneion* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1951), 34; Campbell (above, note 6), 199-200. For the complete text of Scholiast A (on the Louvre papyrus) and Scholiast B (P. Oxy. 2389), see D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1962), 6-9.

[13] West (above, note 11), 8-9. Cf. Page, *Alcman* (above, note 12), 34f. Page takes the phrase with the following line, ἀπ]έδιλος ἀλκὰ / μή τις ἀνθ]ρώπων ἐς ὠρανὸν ποτήσθω and translates "let not the bravery of man leave the ground and soar to heaven."

metaphysics, not for the history and phenomenology of religions."[14] Thus the point of view of the participants is the only one that matters in the context of the ritual,[15] and it is important that we know how and why Hagesichora and Agido are important to the ritual. The poem does several things at once: the cosmogony reveals the source of their power, the Tyndaridae legend provides a more specific mythological paradigm, and a use of elaborate and multivalent imagery allows the poet to illustrate how Hagesichora and Agido must succeed. But the picture is incomplete if we only keep in mind the content of the poem. The performance of the poem is just as important. Hagesichora and Agido effectively become the Tyndaridae. They and the rest of the chorus are in the same frame of mind from line 1 to line 140. From their perspective, as the pair perform the song, not only do Hagesichora and Agido perform from beginning to end, but so do the Tyndaridae. I mean "perform" in both senses of oral performance and achieving the ritual's goal.

The ritual itself involves some sort of competition, as has been generally recognized. However, the combatants mentioned in the lines ἁ δὲ τᾶν Σηρην[ί]δων / ἀοιδοτέρα μ[ὲν οὐχί, / σιαὶ γάρ, ἀντ[ὶ δ' ἔνδεκα / παίδων δεκ[ὰς ἄδ'ἀείδ]ει (96-99) have been interpreted variously. Not only is the identity of the "Ten" and "Eleven" a matter of dispute, but so is the word that ἁ modifies. The numerous particulars of this debate need not be recounted here.[16] The most plausible propositions are those of Giangrande and Puelma, who take ἁ as referring to Hagesichora and make her the subject of ἀείδει. The competition is between Hagesichora, who is so brilliant that she sings *like ten*, and the rest of the chorus, who are, in toto, the *eleven*.[17] At the same time, she remains inferior to the Sirens (for

[14] Rennie (above, note 5), 21.

[15] This understanding of myth is, of course, well known. In the context of shamanism, having acknowledged myth's general function as expressing things that are meaningful and important to any culture, Anna-Leena Siikala goes on to explain, "The manner in which people perceive and organize the reality around them varies from culture to culture. Thus the perception of the world and its phenomena takes shape as different structures of knowledge, image and emotion. The most fundamental areas of cultural consciousness deal with the world view and cultural values of the community; mythology emerges as representations of precisely these structures of fundamental consciousness" *Mythic Images and Shamanism: A Perspective on Kalevala Poetry* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2002), 320-321.

[16] On both matters, see especially West (above, note 11), 11-13, and Page, *Alcman* (above, note 12), 97f.

[17] Giuseppe Giangrande, "On Alcman's Partheneion," *Museum Philologum Londiniense* 2 (1977): 151-164 on pages 157-160; Mario Puelma, "Die Selbstbeschreibung

after all, "they are goddesses"), keeping the performance of the ritual aligned with the moral about the dangers of *hybris* that followed the account of the Hippocoontidae's destruction. A scholium on line 98 provides evidence for the application of the number eleven to the chorus. Giangrande is careful to note that the eleven includes Hagesichora, whose skill matches that of the remaining ten; nonetheless, the chorus is designated by the number of its total complement, eleven.[18] This interpretation makes perfect sense in light of Alcman's text, for now the make-up of the chorus becomes clear: the leader Hagesichora (line 44), whose very name means "chorus leader," Agido, perhaps her "Second-in-Command,"[19] and nine others, all of whom Alcman names in lines 70 to 76.[20]

---

des Chores in Alkmans grossem Partheneion-Fragment," *Museum Helveticum* 34 (1977): 1-55 on pages 45-49. Robbins (above, note 7), 10, follows suit.

[18] Giangrande (above, note 17), 159.

[19] Page, *Alcman* (above, note 12), 44ff.

[20] I include among the nine Ainesimbrota, who is not usually regarded as a member of the chorus. Lines 73-76 read οὐδ' ἐς Αἰνησιμβρ[ό]τας ἐνθοῖσα φασεῖς / 'Ασταφίς [τ]έ μοι γένοιτο / καὶ ποτιγλέποι Φίλυλλα / Δαμαρ[έ]τα τ' ἐρατά τε ϝιανθεμίς ("nor will you go to Ainesimbrota's house and say, 'Let Astaphis be mine, let Philylla look upon me, and Damareta and lovely Vianthemis'"). Page, *Alcman* (above, note 12) 99, sees her as a trainer in an academy for choruses. Cf. Alan Griffiths, "Alcman's Partheneion: The morning after the night before," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 14 (1972): 7-30 on page 22, and Campbell (above, note 6), 208. M. L. West, "Alcmanica," *Classical Quarterly* 15 (1965): 188-202 on page 200, interprets Ainesimbrota's apparent role in these lines as that of a φαρμακεύτρια, who has the ability to work magic spells that help girls win the affections of others, followed by Griffiths, Puelma (above, note 17) 40-41, and Robbins (above, note 7), 11, n.25. Giangrande (above, note 17) 158, n.29, seems to stand alone in his assertion that "Aenesimbrota is excluded from the choir ... without any justification .... The fact that she worked magic spells in order to help her companions in love-affairs does confirm that she was a girl, and not an older woman. Simaitha and Medea were girls of marriageable age." Furthermore, there is no way to account for the eleven members of the chorus without including her. Robbins (above, note 7), 10-11, accepts Puelma's interpretation of the "Eleven," then asserts that eight members are named in lines 70-76 while three others are merely described by their accoutrements in 64-69: οὔτε γάρ τι πορφύρας / τόσσος κόρος ὥστ' ἀμύναι, / οὔτε ποικίλος δράκων / παγχρύσιος, οὐδὲ μίτρα / Λυδία, νεανίδων / ἰανογ[λ]εφάρων ἄγαλμα. But there is no reason to read the references to the purple robes, the embroidered snake-bracelet, and the Lydian headband as indications of individual chorus members. On this point, I follow Campbell (above, note 6), 207: these merely denote qualities that *all* the named singers lack. Afterwards and more importantly, when *each* one is named, it is in their beauty that each is said to be inferior to Hagesichora and Agido in the contest that the ritual entails.

But if Hagesichora's singing ability matches that of the other ten (in effect, 10 vs. 10), to *surpass* them she needs the accompaniment of Agido. Both of them are vital to the success of the ritual. In sacred time, they become the Tyndaridae, an assertion that illuminates the choices of imagery and language that Alcman uses to convey their importance as well as their contrast with the rest of the chorus. Firstly, both Hagesichora and Agido are repeatedly compared to horses (Hagesichora: ἵππον παγόν [47-48], ἵππος Κολαξαῖος [59], σηραφόρῳ [92]; Agido: κέλης Ἐνητικός [50-51], Ἰβηνῷ [59]), which has the effect of linking them to the Tyndaridae[21] and conveying the idea that Hagesichora and Agido will outpace, as it were, the other chorus members in terms of their singing ability.[22] It is clear that the two are in competition with the chorus, as lines 60-63 indicate: ταὶ Πεληάδες γάρ ἄμιν / ὀρθρίαι φᾶρος φεροίσαις / νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίαν ἄτε σήριον / ἄστρον ἀυηρομέναι μάχονται ("For the Pleiades in the early morning rising like the star Sirius through the ambrosial night *fight against us* as we bear the *pharos*."). It is the other nine members of the chorus who are singing at this point. Hagesichora and Agido are here equated with the Pleiades, although the latter are also to be taken literally as stars, for reasons to be discussed soon. The opposition of Hagesichora and Agido with the chorus, designated as the "Eleven," immediately recalls the opposition of the twin Tyndaridae and the Hippocoontidae, who number eleven and are named in the damaged lines 2-12.[23] Moreover, the chorus claims Hagesichora as their "cousin" (ἀνεψιᾶς, line 52). So, too, the Tyndaridae were cousins of the eleven sons of Hippocoon, brother to Tyndareus. And so, as the two preeminent members of the chorus compete with the rest in the performance of the ritual, they are reactualizing another contest between a pair and their eleven cousins. The girls have a mission to accomplish—i.e., the ritual has a specific purpose—and while the nature of that mission remains unclear to scholars, who cannot agree on the meaning of φᾶρος, Hagesichora and Agido call upon a myth in order to bring about success. The Tyndaridae provide the paradigm, and *Poros* gives the two

[21] Robbins (above, note 7), 13-14.

[22] Although the fact that Alcman uses racing imagery to convey the superiority of Hagesichora's and Agido's singing ability has been well understood, the applicability and appropriateness of the imagery has led to disagreement over whether the "race" is metaphorical. Giangrande (above, note 17), 162-163, has shown that "metaphors of *speedy* and *racing* animals to denote ability to utter words in singing or speaking are traditional in antiquity." But while Giangrande thus believes that the "race" in question is metaphorical, there *is* a literal race going on in the course of the ritual, for which the image of the Pleiades is important (see below).

[23] On these lines, see Robbins (above, note 7), 11.

girls, because they have entered sacred time, the means of achieving the ritual's goal. Eliade would argue that, whatever that goal, *Poros* is once again operating as a cosmogonic facilitator of the proper order of things, whether they have agricultural, matrimonial, or some other significance. While we may part company with Eliade that the cosmogony as a type of myth underlies all other types (see footnote 10), in this case Alcman's cosmogony certainly is the ultimate source for the importance of Hagesichora and Agido.

As for the *pharos*, which I have so far left to be explained, the identification of this object could ultimately lead to the identification of the ritual. Unfortunately, a firm conclusion on this question will almost certainly never be reached. One can read φᾶρος a number of ways with equal plausibility,[24] although taking it as a plow does have a certain appeal in the context of my analysis. We have seen how consciously Alcman connected his girls' song and the Tyndaridae myth to his own cosmogony. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that Alcman perceived a cyclicity here: after all, the girls' competition clearly recalls the Tyndaridae's contest, which restores the natural order of things that the cosmogony has established. How appropriate then that the ritual for which Alcman has written a choral ode should involve a cyclical process—agriculture, guided by the pattern of the seasons.[25]

---

[24] The word literally means "robe," a common-enough offering in ritual. However, Griffiths (above, note 20), 18-19, insists that a corruption took place in the manuscript, so that φᾶρος was originally φᾶϝος. The object each girl is carrying then is a torch for a wedding ceremony. This would reinforce the light imagery of lines 40-41 and 62-63, discussed further below. But Giangrande (above, note 17), 152, is right that we are obliged to pay attention to the ancient evidence, in this case Scholiast A's equating of φᾶρος with ἄροτρον, following a comment by Sosiphanes. The comment stems from the scholarly tradition of Alexandria, where other sources besides Alcman would use φᾶρος in this sense. Although I am arguing for the plow because it best fits my Eliadean interpretation of this and other imagery, I do think that the linguistic, religious, and archaeological evidence that Giangrande compiles makes the case for the plow the most cogent.

[25] Agricultural ceremonies, like other fertility rites, are especially concerned with renewal. Eliade, *Sacred* (above, note 2), 80, explains that the religious man's intense desire to return to *illud tempus*, sacred time, is bound up in the regenerative effect it has on himself and his world. He notes two features of this desire: "1) through annual repetition of the cosmogony, time was regenerated, that is, it began again as sacred time, for it coincided with the *illud tempus* in which the world had first come into existence; 2) by participating ritually in the end of the world and in its re-creation, any man became contemporary with the *illud tempus*; hence, he was born anew, he began life over again with his reserve of vital forces *intact*, as it was at the moment of his birth." Such activity occurs in New Year ceremonies, such as the *akitu* festival in Babylon, on which see *Sacred* (above, note 2), 77. When Marduk defeats Tiamat once again, the new year begins as the entire world had once begun, with the purity *ab origine*.

Such a judgment makes interpretation of the Pleiades somewhat easier. I translated the passage above (60-63) with the understanding that the Pleiades represent Hagesichora and Agido, following the lead of the two scholiasts. The ritual involves a contest between these "Pleiades" and the rest of the chorus. But there is a second contest occuring as well, and the outcome of that contest will determine the success of the ritual. This second contest is a race, not metaphorical, but literal, between the entire chorus and *time*. In this scenario the Pleiades are literally stars (and Eliade would be the first to point out that the two interpretations of the Pleiades need not be mutually exclusive). The ceremony must be completed by a certain time, which is denoted by the rising of the Pleiades. Its success depends not only on Hagesichora's and Agido's brilliance but also on getting done by a certain time. Comparing them to horses now takes on new signifiance. The emphasis on speed heightens our understanding of just how important the two are to the ritual.

Alcman's light imagery reinforces this importance. If we take the Pleiades literally as stars, then we are obviously dealing with a ritual performed at night, apparently shortly before dawn (ὀρθρίαι). Also in the sky is the star Sirius. Charles Segal proposes that here, too, Alcman praises the brilliance of Hagesichora and Agido by likening them to Sirius, even though its appearance in the sky portends disaster. Since the rest of the chorus is in rivalry with them and they think little of their chances against the likes of Hagesichora and Agido, the ominous symbol of Sirius is appropriate. But how can the two be compared both to the brilliant Sirius *and* the faint Pleiades? Segal's answer, going beyond the literal and appreciating Alcman's poetical skill, is that "Alcman is deliberately and wittily exploiting a paradox. If the 'light' of Agido (40-43) and the beauty of Hagesichora are here brought together as a single radiance shining against the rest of the choir, it is appropriate that the beauty of the two girls should be described in terms of the single bright star, Sirius."[26] Again, it is the importance of Hagesichora and Agido *together* that Alcman must stress in order to connect the second half of the poem to the first. The significance is twofold: 1) the two are differentiated from the rest of the chorus, 2) the two are "brilliant." But what do we mean by "brilliant"? As we encounter the light imagery of 60-63, we are reminded of Alcman's earlier comparison of Agido with the sun and of her radiating *phōs*.[27]

[26] Charles Segal, "Sirius and the Pleiades in Alcman's Louvre *Partheneion*," *Mnemosyne* 36 (1983): 260-275 on page 270.

[27] ἐγὼν δ' ἀείδω / 'Αγιδῶς τὸ φῶς· ὁρῶ / ϝ' ὥτ' ἄλιον, ὄνπερ ἄμιν / 'Αγιδὼ μαρτύρεται / φαίνην ("I sing of the light of Agido; I see her shining as the sun, which Agido calls upon to witness [our ritual]," lines 39-43). I am following to some degree the translations of West and Campbell in my rendering of μαρτύρεται.

Although the sun reference may place the time of the ceremony just before dawn, since Agido calls upon it to witness the ritual (or perhaps its final result), the reference attains a further significance in light of the word φῶς. It is possible that φῶς refers to Agido's beauty or even to the torch she carries, but Puelma has argued convincingly for a religious meaning—that is, the "brilliance" of Agido refers to her potential to do her part to accomplish the ritual's objective.[28] Just as Hagesichora was named at line 77, after the list of chorus members, as the best chance for the successful completion of the ritual (at least among those ten at 70-77), so Agido at 39-43 is also important.[29] The two in their respective ways are empowered to elicit divine aid—in other words, to enter sacred time. In fact, Alcman is downright explicit about that at 78-84:

οὐ γὰρ ἁ κ[α]λλίσφυρος
Ἀγησιχ[ό]ρ[α] παρ' αὐτεῖ,
Ἀγιδοῖ [δ' ἵκτ]αρ μένει
θωστήρ[ιά τ'] ἄμ' ἐπαινεῖ;
ἀλλὰ τᾶν [εὐχάς], σιοί,
δέξασθε· [σι]ῶν γὰρ ἄνα
καὶ τέλος.

For the beautiful-ankled Hagesichora is not present right here; she stands close to Agido and commends the festival. Gods, receive their prayers, for in your hands lie [the festival's] fulfillment and consummation.

Thus, after bringing the two together with horse and light imagery, after likening them to the Tyndaridae, after showing their brilliance by comparing them to the lesser members of the chorus, Alcman brings about a culmination of sorts of his own, as if in preparation for the jolting metaphor of the "Ten" that is Hagischora, leading to who knows what in the four lines that followed our last extant lines. In this particular rite, only someone who sings "like ten" paired with someone who possesses religious *phôs* will accomplish the ceremony's goal, which involves the invocation of divine aid (σιοί) through prayer (εὐχάς).

The work of previous scholars has been vital to the foregoing analysis of Alcman's Louvre *Partheneion*, at least of the content of it, but it is important to remember that what makes this analysis particularly Eliadean is the fact that we have dealt with it as an *oral* poem performed in a *religious*

[28] Puelma (above, note 17), 7-15.

[29] However, as we have noted with other imagery, any single interpretation need not be exclusive. After all, the physical beauty of Agido is still very important to the ritual's success. See further Segal (above, note 26), 265.

context. Is it fair to say that an oral performance can itself be a sacred act? Consider, by analogy, the role of oral tradition in shamanism. Studies of shamanism, such as Anna-Leena Siikala's consideration of the shamanistic nature of Finnish folk poetry, reveal an interesting parallel to what I have described here, though of course the analogy only applies in the most general terms. The shaman's very function is to commune with the sacred for the purpose of maintaining the health of his community.[30] Shamans do so by employing myth, to put it simply. They access an enormous reservoir of mythical images and narrative patterns as they make their way through otherworldly realms. This material is traditional, but they have the freedom to reformulate and reinterpret it. The mythical realm is their domain of activity because the source of whatever afflicts the shaman's community is thought to emanate from that realm.[31] The genres shamans work in may not be the same as what we have with Alcman's *Partheneion*, but the principle is still the same.

Obviously, Eliade felt that understanding a society's mythology and religion required appreciating the indigenous perspective since the sacred is a matter of point of view. The sacred is perceived by a given culture as what is real and meaningful. Sacred time is that "eternal present" of living myth which the "religious man" who seeks to renew or improve some aspect of his world wishes to enter so that it may empower him to achieve his goal. The fulfillment of the ritual in Alcman's poem depended on two singers who were best suited through their natural gifts to bring the entire chorus into sacred time. They were required to be two in number because the Tyndaridae were two. They became the Tyndaridae in that they repeated the latter's task of reestablishing the proper order of things, which ultimately stems from the beginning of *all* things, the time *ab origine* that is described in myth by a cosmogony. Thus the centrality of Hagesichora and Agido in my analysis of the poem's most vexing elements is not surprising. The light imagery (even the Pleiades), the horse imagery, the "Ten," even *Poros* itself all focus on the two lead singers. In the quotidian world, these elements (except perhaps *Poros*), as well as the mysterious *pharos*, are merely facets of the profane. But as Alcman employs them, they are religious in nature, and so they enable the audience to appreciate the monumental task and the incredible ability of the two lead singers as they see the ritual

[30] Siikala (above, note 15), 43.

[31] It is understandable, then, why the material with which they work should be traditional, despite the innovations of their performance. Shamans work with particular motifs, themes, and personages that are known to affect their own culture in certain ways. Knowledge of this mythical world is therefore vital if one is to restore his community to health. See further Siikala (above, note 15), 56-66, 320-334.

through to its culmination, its *telos*. While we may never know the purpose of this venture, i.e., *what* the ritual was supposed to accomplish, we can at least enjoy the genius of Alcman by observing *how* it was accomplished.[32]

University of California, Davis

[32] This paper benefitted enormously from the advice and criticisms of Theodore Tarkow, Eugene Lane, and the editors and anonymous readers at *CML*. To them I express my heartfelt thanks.